

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 14AVIATION WEEK & SPACE TECHNOLOGY  
22 OCTOBER 1979CLARENCE A. TR,  
C4A3.03 CIA Pubs  
ORIGINATOR  
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# Missile Defense Gains Support

## Mutual assured destruction losing credence as deterrent with growing realization of U. S. vulnerability to Soviets

By Clarence A. Robinson, Jr.

Washington—Ballistic missile and air defense programs are gaining support in Congress and the Defense Dept. with the growing realization of U. S. vulnerability to a Soviet nuclear weapons first strike within two or three years.

The U. S. abandoned systems development of strategic weapons defenses with the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty under the assumption that both the U. S. and USSR accepted the underlying tenet of mutual assured destruction holding the populations of both countries hostage to a nuclear attack. Since that time, the USSR has emphasized ballistic missile and air defense while technology has been kept at a low level in the U. S.

A number of factors are evolving which make defensive systems possible now for the U. S. They are:

- Capability in the near- to mid-term to defend against ballistic missiles from space using high-energy lasers to destroy missiles in the boost phase, non-nuclear kill mechanisms to intercept reentry vehicles in mid-course in space and interceptor missiles to provide still another defensive layer within the atmosphere. Part of this effort is incorporated in a program named Talon Gold.

- Technology now state of the art that can deal with large numbers of ballistic missile reentry vehicles economically.

- Availability of air defense missile systems, now maturing in development programs, that can be used for defending the North American continent as well as for air defense in Europe.

- Fighter aircraft already operational in the Air Force and Navy that can engage multiple targets at long range, enabling early procurement of air defense interceptors such as the McDonnell Douglas F-15 and the Grumman F-14. The aircraft could screen out the Soviet Tupolev Tu-22M Backfire bomber carrying long-range, nuclear-armed cruise missiles now being developed in the USSR.

- Realization that a dramatic shift in the balance of power will take place when either the Soviet Union or the U. S. becomes invulnerable to nuclear weapons attack. The Soviets are working to achieve this invulnerability in areas of air, ballistic missile and civil defense.

- Leverage the U. S. can gain in deploying a low-altitude defense system along with the MX advanced ICBM in racetrack horizontal shelters. The U. S. is moving toward prototyping a new, rapidly deployable antiballistic missile defense for use with MX (AW&T Mar. 9, p. 23). A single ballistic missile defense interceptor in each racetrack basing complex for MX would force the Soviets to double the number of reentry vehicles targeted on that location, gaining the U. S. leverage by forcing the Soviets to use multiple aimpoints.

Staff members of the House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations committees met with industry representatives Oct. 12 to delve into defensive system capabilities and required funding. The meeting emphasized the development of high-energy laser systems and the critical technology required for deployment against hostile spacecraft and ballistic missiles in the early 1980s.

Industry representatives have been asked to provide detailed technical information on requirements and funding profiles to Senate committee members.

There is strong bipartisan support in the Senate for ballistic missile defense, according to several staffers, including support among liberal factions. The emphasis is on space-based high-energy lasers for defense.

One staff member said it is being brought about because "people here are thinking about war with the Soviets as a real possibility. It is obvious that the USSR is building these kinds of weapons and preparing for their use. If they use them, the question then is what can we do. There is a realization that it is small comfort to kill Russians and far more meaningful to safeguard Americans."

There is a willingness among members of Congress to spend money now to safeguard the nation. "This means the death of the mutual assured destruction concept, which occurred several years ago in intellectual and academic circles; it is now being recognized on the Hill," the staffer said.

There already is a plan to begin high-

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